
From: HJR153
Sent: Friday, September 10, 2004 5:55 PM
To: HJR153
Subject: HJR153 - Robert K. Bengtson

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Comments: On behalf of the City of Roanoke, we are pleased that this study is underway to examine the feasibility of underground placement of overhead utility lines. Our community's comprehensive plan (VISION 2001 - 2020) certainly endorses such treatment of utility lines. By relocating overhead lines in this manner, we reduce the clutter that is created along our streets and thereby improve the overall visual quality of our city. Research points to the undergrounding of utilities as being an important part of economic development and revitalization efforts. Further, we reduce the effect that overhead lines have on street trees, and reduce the problems and hazards that overhead lines incur during major storms. While, in addition to the issue of cost, we recognize that other issues would remain with the need for ancillary equipment such as access boxes above grade, property owner costs to change to underground service, and the need for poles to remain to support street lights, the benefits appear to support the need to institute some system of undergrounding.

The City of Roanoke's current policies require utility lines for new subdivisions to be located at the rear of properties and "strongly encourages" underground wiring. Distribution lines for new development must be located underground in certain residential and commercial zoning districts. The core of our downtown area was the subject of a major program to bury overhead lines decades ago. Currently proposed changes in our zoning ordinance will seek to further strengthen such requirements.

We further recognize that in some existing situations, alternatives may ultimately need to be considered for relocation of overhead lines to alleys or by consolidation of overhead lines onto fewer poles.

In an effort to establish the funds necessary to launch this overall effort, funding scenarios that ought to be considered should include special assessment districts for neighborhood projects, utility surcharges, and perhaps a competitive grant program.

Ultimately, any legislation (state or local) that provides the tools that will enable localities (perhaps only urbanized areas at this time) the support needed to have overhead lines placed underground will be welcome.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment and look forward to continued opportunities to provide input.